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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000790

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE LOWER IN RUN-UP TO RURAL BY-ELECTION

REF: A. HARARE 752

[B](#). HARARE 751

[C](#). HARARE 530

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: On May 10 the Ambassador met with MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube and MDC Spokesperson Paul

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Themba-Nyathi. Ncube commented on lower levels of violence in the pre-election period in Lupane, sympathetic meetings with South African officials, and an internal MDC conflict between trade unionists and non-trade unionists. END SUMMARY.

By-Election Environment

[2](#). (C) Having just returned from two weeks in Lupane (Matabeleland North) where campaigning for a May 15 - 16 by-election is well underway, Ncube reported that violence was lower than in previous elections, however intimidation was widespread. He said the MDC had been able to hold almost all of its campaign meetings and rallies without disruption. Ncube said the MDC had been able to convey its message effectively, but it was unclear whether that would be sufficient to win the election in the face of ZANU-PF tactics.

[3](#). (C) Ncube reported that the GOZ-appointed District Administrator had given kraalheads (traditional village sub-chiefs) specific instructions to organize residents under their jurisdictions to vote. The kraalheads were to maintain lists of their residents, bring their people to the polling stations, and record the names of residents who actually voted. The voters were supposed to write down the serial number of their ballot paper, and give that number to their kraalheads after voting to verify votes for ZANU-PF.

[4](#). (C) There were rumors circulating in Lupane that a "Gukurahundi" (the name commonly used for the government massacres of residents of Matabeleland in the early 1980s) would happen again if the ZANU-PF candidate in Lupane did not win.

[5](#). (C) Ncube said that ZANU-PF rallies and campaign meetings had been sparsely attended and that kraalheads were subsequently requested to convey campaign messages in community meetings with their residents. Some ZANU-PF rallies were later billed as "community meetings" in order to get more residents to attend.

[6](#). (C) Ncube said that there had only been about 4 - 5 incidents of direct violence on MDC supporters during the campaign period. In one case a provincial organizer was threatened by ZANU-PF youths and was escorted home without incident. In another case ZANU-PF youths visited the home of a ward chairman and assaulted his son when they did not find the chairman. Ncube said there were 2 - 3 other cases about which he did not have details.

[7](#). (C) He reported that MDC leaders met with ZANU-PF provincial authorities for Matabeleland North and agreed that violence should be avoided. Ncube said that ZANU-PF candidate Martin Khumalo had made a public statement that he lived in Lupane, and would not want to preside over an election marred by violence where anyone was killed. Ncube said he thought ZANU-PF might have assessed that violence, given the memory of the Gukurahundi, would backfire. Ncube said police had been helpful making arrests irrespective of political affiliation.

[8](#). (C) Ncube said that Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) members, many actually from Lupane, had spoken at many MDC rallies conveying the message that using kraalheads for campaign organizing was illegal, and reinforcing an ESC pamphlet that the ballot was secret. Ncube thought, however, that it was unlikely ESC representatives made similar comments at ZANU-PF rallies.

[9](#). (C) Ncube said that some residents were angry at ZANU-PF

for having being ferried some 25 kilometers to a large ZANU-PF rally held on May 8 at which Vice President Msika spoke, but then having to walk home afterward.  
Sympathy from South Africa  
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110. (C) Ncube reported that in a trip to South Africa during Mbeki's inauguration, he met with several Foreign Ministry officials including Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad. Ncube said that especially in the wake of the violence in Zengeza, South African officials were unhappy that the situation in Zimbabwe was not improving. They acknowledged that waiting for ZANU-PF's willingness to talk was like drifting without urgency. RSA officials observed that ZANU-PF might simply be waiting for the MDC to implode and cease to be a political force. Ncube said he encouraged the GOSA to communicate to the GOZ that proceeding to the March 2005 elections under the current electoral environment was unacceptable and would not result in a legitimate outcome.

#### Parliamentary Elections and Talks -----

111. (C) Ncube opined that ZANU-PF clearly did not want presidential and parliamentary elections coordinated because the ruling party had no presidential candidate.

112. (C) Ncube said that even with a favorable outcome from March 2005 parliamentary elections, without formal interparty talks, there would be no political reform because of presidential authority to use unchecked executive power. Similarly, without a new constitution, power sharing between the MDC and ZANU-PF would be impossible.

#### Internal Conflicts Simmering -----

113. (C) Commenting on MDC internal differences, Ncube said that there was cohesion and direction within the membership and also between the membership and leadership. Ncube said there was internal cohesion within all provincial party structures except Harare, Chitungwiza (a large high-density suburb of Harare) and Masvingo.

114. (C) Commenting on cohesion problems affecting Harare and Chitungwiza, Ncube said differences between MDC leaders were being resolved. He said that someone, presumably within the MDC leadership, undoubtedly directed MDC youths to attack MDC MP Job Sikhala but Ncube did not specify whom. Ncube said current conflicts within the leadership stemmed from the flawed selection of the party's candidate for the Zengeza by-election (a high-density suburb of Harare) (Ref C). Ncube said the party simply did not follow its own candidate selection procedures in that case, but now some within the party were defending the candidate because he was a trade unionist. Ncube said trade unionists within the party were complaining that they were being prevented from running for MP slots. Ncube said this confused the issue, the party structures did not select the trade unionist as their candidate simply because he was less popular than the candidate they had in mind. It had nothing to do with him being a trade unionist.

115. (C) Nyathi explained that MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai, essentially under house arrest, sometimes did not

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hear the whole story. Ncube, however, took responsibility for the issue acknowledging that it was the Secretary General who had ultimate responsibility for internal cohesion.

#### Restructuring Underway -----

116. (C) Ncube confirmed that the plan to restructure the whole party to prepare for the March 2005 elections was underway (Ref A). Ian Makoni, who had been appointed head of the elections directorate, had not yet presented the leadership with a strategy plan. On receipt of such a plan, the leadership would review and approve it, then Makoni would go forward with programming. Ncube said Makoni was now reviewing the party's performance in previous elections in developing his plan.

#### Comment: -----

117. (C) That the pre-election environment in Lupane has so far been less violent than usual is a very good sign for the MDC. Residents still resent the government for the atrocities of the Gukurahundi, and it is possible that the ruling party is afraid to do anything too violent in fear of provoking people to vote against ZANU-PF. The ruling party's pattern has generally been to repress people only as much as is necessary. Organizing kraalheads could be a more effective way to motivate votes for ZANU-PF, but it remains

unclear whether residents will all follow instructions.

118. (C) Responsible for the party's internal cohesion, Ncube has generally downplayed internal conflicts. Nevertheless, he has previously identified Party Chairman Isaac Matongo as behind the debacle in Zengeza (Ref A), but this time he shifted blame to "trade unionists" in general -- clearly identifying yet another fissure within the fledgling opposition party.

119. (C) Ncube had very little to report from his engagement within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Africa except general sympathy for the MDC's plight. The MDC and we still look to the region for increased pressure on the GOZ, but without South Africa's leadership, other countries are unlikely to take a stand against Mugabe, regardless of any respective bilateral beefs (Ref B).  
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